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**INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,**

**DELIVERED IN THE**

**THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,**

PRINCETON, N. J. NOV. 7, 1823.

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**BY CHARLES HODGE.**

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**LECTURE,**  
ADDRESSED TO THE STUDENTS  
OF THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

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MY DEAR BRETHREN,

In entering anew upon my duties in this institution, I feel constrained to acknowledge the goodness of God, by which I have been so kindly preserved, and restored to the field of labor to which he has called me. As it was a desire to become more useful to you, that led me to leave, for so protracted a period, my friends and country, my heart has been constantly turned towards this institution ; and it frequently occurred to me, that should I live to return to my native land, I would endeavour to impress upon your minds, the practical truths which the circumstances of foreign states and countries, had deeply impressed upon my own. It is true, the vividness of these impressions has faded away, but the convictions in which they resulted, remain. Although the truths referred to, are obvious, and their importance admitted ; and although I may fail to bring before your minds, the various circumstances which impress them upon the mind of an American Christian in Europe, it may still be useful to state some of these points, and some of the grounds on which the opinions entertained respecting them, are founded.

I. One of the most obvious lessons which an American Christian is taught, by a residence in Europe, is, *the great importance of civil and religious liberty.*

We are apt, I know, to indulge in unthinking declamation on this subject, and to cherish exaggerated notions of our pe-

peculiar advantages in these respects. Nor can it be questioned, that much of our dislike of the peculiar forms of foreign governments, arises from no very pure feeling. The impressions, however, commonly entertained regarding the amount of personal liberty, enjoyed under these governments, are doubtless erroneous. In many cases, the most distinguished stations in every department are accessible to all classes, and there is no doubt, that in some of the more despotic even of these governments, the laws are made with as pure a regard to the best interests of the community, and are administered with as much impartial justice as they ever have been, or are likely to be in our own. It is clear too, that when the authority is vested in the hands of one individual, good may be much more promptly effected than when it is lodged in the mass of the people. Is it not a subject of constant complaint among us, that measures designed and adapted to the mental and moral improvement of the people, cannot be carried into effect, because the least enlightened portion of the community is opposed to them? It is, however, very far from my design, and would be very unsuitable to the present occasion, to enter upon any discussion of the comparative advantages of different forms of government. I merely wish to state, what I think would be the impression made upon any candid individual on this subject. He would doubtless see, and be ready to admit, that many of his early opinions were unfounded; that there are advantages attending the European systems which he had not previously properly appreciated, and yet, he would be deeply convinced of their general evil tendency, and of the inestimable blessing which we enjoy in our own. The great advantage which constitutes in the eye of the Christian the value of our system, is its elevating effect upon the mass of the population. Where the people have nothing to occupy and excite their minds beyond the mere routine of their daily labor; where they are never called upon to think and act in reference to important and general objects; where

passive obedience is substituted for active co-operation ; there the mind inevitably sinks—a heavy unexcitable character is induced which nothing can change. Notwithstanding, therefore, the advantage which in some countries of Europe the people enjoy of early education, yet returning at an early age to the dull duties of a peasant's life, they soon relapse into a state of unthinking apathy and sluggishness. The contrast between them and the cultivators of the soil in our own country is immense. This mental inactivity is itself a great evil—man is degraded—he is less an intellectual being, and less susceptible of moral or intellectual impressions. It is in this light and for this reason, that we are called upon as the friends of religion, and human improvement, to rejoice in the free institutions with which God has blessed our happy country.

I have already, however, dwelt longer than I intended upon this part of the subject. The view in which liberty is most interesting to us, is in reference to the church. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world, but it constitutes in the world, a self-existent and independent society, and as such has all the rights of self-government. Among these essential rights, which the church can never resign and which can never be lawfully taken from her; are the rights of deciding upon the terms of membership, selecting and ordaining her own officers, regulating her internal concerns, the exercise of discipline, and in short, all those rights which are inherent in a voluntary association recognised by the laws. When the church is so united to the state as to lose this individuality of character, and resign the rights of self-government, it becomes a mere branch of a secular system. The head of the state is the head of the church, and exercises, as such, either directly or indirectly, the governing power. Under such a system, ministers of the gospel, are servants of the crown, (*Staatsbeamten*, as they are called in the Prussian laws,) appointed for the instruction of the people in religion, as judges and civil officers are appointed for the administration

of the laws. The church is governed by men appointed by the civil authority, it cannot choose its own officers, make its own laws, nor cast out unwholesome members.

However beautiful it may be in theory, to regard the king as the father of a great family ; and as such, bound and authorized, to provide for all its wants, secular and spiritual ; it never can, in the present state of the world, be carried into practice, without either making the state subservient to the church, or the church an engine of government to the state. The former has been the result in Catholic, the latter in Protestant countries.

The evils resulting from this union are obvious, and unavoidable. The church being put into the hands, and under the direction of statesmen, is of course, used for attaining the object which the state, as such, has in view, viz. the temporal well-being of society. They require in its officers, no other qualifications than such as this object demands ; they take cognizance of no offences but such as obviously militate against it. When the church is thus secularized, that the clergy should become worldly, would seem inevitable. Besides this, civil rulers, were they ever so well qualified to exercise the governing power in the church, in many cases, cannot do it without injustice, for in their hands ecclesiastical discipline becomes a secular punishment. To depose a man from the ministry, is often virtually to banish him his country ; to prevent a profligate parent from presenting his child for baptism, is to deprive that child of most of the rights of citizenship. It is next to impossible to preserve either purity of faith or practice, under such circumstances. When the church has once fallen in errors however serious, how is the evil to be remedied ? Should a number of scattered ministers become orthodox and pious, what can they do ? They can preach and write, but having no authority, they cannot stop the tide of irreligious men constantly flowing into the sacred office. They are completely fettered, and weep in silence over the desolations which they cannot re-

store. A free community is a living community, it can throw off its own impurities, and if it fall can rise again.

One of the most striking illustrations of the advantages of self-government in religious societies, is exhibited in the case of the Moravians in Germany. During all the desolating reign of infidelity in that country, they have retained their faith and piety. In some instances, the fervor of religion has declined among them, but the vital principle remained, and the society as a whole, is probably to this day in as favorable a state as any other equal portion of the Christian church. Their settlements, even in their external appearance, from their order and neatness, and the elevated character of the people, are like verdant spots in the desert. And while infidelity prevailed all around them, here the gospel was still preached and loved. Another equally striking example may be cited in the Dissenters of England. I am aware that effects of this nature are seldom attributable to any one cause, but I am persuaded, that among the various causes which combine in the production of the effect now referred to, that of self-government is one of the most important. It is, at least, an important fact, that the freest churches are the purest. In those sections of Prussia, where the church has retained most of its rights, it has retained most of its purity. In the Rhine Provinces, the reformed churches, surrounded by a Catholic population, were allowed by their Catholic sovereigns, to manage their own affairs, and, since their union with Prussia, have retained more or less of their power. Here the influence of infidelity was the least felt, and the soonest thrown off: and here religion is in a more flourishing condition than in any other part of the country. The same may be said with some limitation of several cantons of Switzerland. The clergy of the canton of Basle, are as a body orthodox and pious; a large portion of those in the canton de Vaud, is of the same character. But with regard to Switzerland, it is difficult to

speak. We are in the habit of regarding it as the land of liberty ; but in ecclesiastical affairs, there is a great deal of constraint. In the Catholic cantons no Protestants, until recently, were tolerated, and in those purely Protestant, the laws were equally severe against the Catholics. The form of government in each canton, is peculiar to itself. In most, it is more or less aristocratical, and in all the Protestant cantons, I believe, the magistrates have a dominant influence in the affairs of the church. The same may be said of the free cities of Germany, as Frankfort, Bremen, and Hamburg ; and therefore the decline of religion in such cities, cannot fairly be cited as examples of the decline of independent churches. In the last named city, the evil of magistrates having authority in the church, is deeply felt at the present moment ; the clergy have been prohibited from preaching on the points in dispute between the orthodox and the rationalists ; permission has been refused to the advocates of the truth to publish on these subjects, and in various ways, the reviving spirit of piety has been repressed and opposed.

This is a deeply interesting subject. The great question whether the church can sustain itself without the aid of the state, has never perhaps been subjected to so fair and extended a trial since the fourth century as at present in our own country. As far as the experiment has hitherto been made, the result is as favorable as the friends of religious liberty could reasonably expect. Two centuries have elapsed since the first persecuted settlers of New-England set their feet upon these shores, to rear a church in all the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. The population of that section of the country has increased from a few individuals to eighteen hundred thousand, and there is now one minister to every thousand souls ; a proportion greater than in some of the oldest countries of Europe ; and there is doubtless, no equal population upon earth to whom the gospel is administered with greater fidelity and purity. The same may be said of

our own church, and of various sections of our country and denominations of Christians. In estimating the success of this experiment, there are two important circumstances which should be taken into account. The one is the rapid increase of our population. The American churches have had to supply the means of religious instruction, not merely to the regular and natural increase of their number, but to keep pace with a population which doubles itself in twenty-five years. The other circumstance is, that in many parts of our country, the population is so sparse, that to bring the ordinances of religion within the convenient reach of every family, would require one minister to every few hundred individuals. Taking these circumstances into consideration, I think that it may safely be asserted, that quite as much has been accomplished towards supplying the people with religious instruction, as in countries where this duty rests upon their governments, and quite as much as would have been accomplished by any church establishment; and to unspeakably better purpose. Still, the experiment is but in progress, and the eyes of the friends of religion, and of religious liberty, are watching its advance with the most intense anxiety. Every effort made by the free churches in America, to supply the gospel to their destitute brethren, fills their hearts with joy. Nor are they alone in the interest which they take in the state of things in this country. Those who differ from them in opinion on this subject, are watching us too, and often appeal to what they deem the failure of the experiment, in America, of a church standing without the aid of government. The accounts so often published among us, of extensive regions destitute of the means of grace, are produced as evidence of this failure. The amount of good really accomplished, and the greatness of the task imposed on the American churches, they cannot appreciate, and are thus unfortunately led to argue, from our experience, against the expediency of releasing the

struggling church, in their own country. I have heard distinguished men affirm, that if the king of Prussia should withdraw his hand from the church in his dominions, it would fall at once; and that, at the expiration of a century, they did not believe there would remain a trace of Christianity in the land. But can this be so? is the gospel so powerless? must the kingdom of Christ be propped and supported by human power, or fall to the ground? must the church submit to the contamination, unavoidable on her union with the state, or cease to exist? For the honor of Christ and his gospel, let this never be said. But let us, brethren, awake to the full interest and importance of the task to which God has called us. If the sad tale be to be told, in every Christian country, and at every Christian fire-side, (for the interest taken in this subject is well nigh universal,) that the American church has fallen, that the grand experiment has failed, let it not be in consequence of the remissness of the present generation. Our fathers have effected much in this work, and have left the rapidly increasing task to us; and a more sacred duty, a duty more vitally involving the interests and honor of religion, cannot be conceived, than that of supplying the ordinances of the gospel to the rapidly increasing population of our country, without being brought to the sad necessity of resigning liberty for life. For we may rest assured that, if the state support the church, she will govern it. Then, farewell to the purest glory of this Western Hemisphere. America will have failed of her destiny, and left her grand vocation unaccomplished.

II. Permit me now to introduce another subject scarcely less important, as the second point I would mention, in which the mind of an American Christian would be deeply interested from a residence in Europe, viz. *the training of youth in knowledge and religion.*

The comparison between the state of things in our country, and that existing in Europe, respecting the church, is



most decidedly to our advantage ; but in reference to the point now brought forward, I am afraid it is the reverse. I shall in a very few words, state the system pursued in Prussia, both because I had better opportunities of learning its character, and because I presume it is at least equal to any other in general use. And first, the schools are divided into three classes ; the higher schools or gymnasia, designed for men intended for one of the learned professions ; the schools for merchants and higher order of mechanics ; and those for the peasantry. Teachers for all these are regularly educated for their business. Those intended for the gymnasia, after having spent seven or eight years in one of these institutions, proceed to the university, where they remain from three to five years, attending the lectures on the branches in which they are to become teachers. Having completed this course, they are subjected to a rigorous examination, which, if they satisfactorily sustain, they are eligible to the office of instructors in the higher schools, commencing with the lower classes and rising according to merit. Those who are designed for the second class of schools, have an entirely different training ; for this purpose, there is in each of the ten provinces at least one large seminary. In these institutions the future teachers, are instructed, not only in the branches they are themselves to teach, but also in the art of teaching ; the whole object being to prepare and discipline them for their work. It is not until they have completed this course, and have sustained an examination by the proper authorities, that they are allowed to enter upon their duties as instructors. For the preparation of teachers of country schools, for which such a thorough course of discipline is not considered necessary, there are smaller institutions, several in each province, all under the direction of government. These teachers are also examined as to their moral and mental qualifications, before they are allowed to enter even on the lowest grade of elementary instruction. With respect to the mode by which

the schools are supported, it must be remarked that it is different in different cases. The gymnasia, as they are designed for the higher classes of the people, are either supported by their own funds, (for some of them are very extensive establishments which have been in operation for centuries ; the one in Nordhausen being I think, 300 years old) or by the usual tuition fees. The lower schools are supported by tax, where there is no adequate provision already existing; very much as in Massachusetts. The whole country is divided into districts, and the property in each district is assessed for the support of its school. This is the simplest and most efficacious plan. The schools are then not only free, but every parent is required under pain of fine or imprisonment to send his children. This law extends to the Jews, Protestants, and Catholics. If the Jews in any one place be sufficiently numerous, and have property enough, they have schools of their own. If this be not the case, they must send their children to those of the Christians. The Catholics have their own seminaries for the preparation of teachers, and their own schools supported in the same manner, and under the same regulations with those of the Protestants.

As to the course of instruction pursued in these several institutions, my time will allow me to say very little. In the gymnasia, there is a very thorough course, in the ancient languages, in several of the modern tongues, in mathematics, geography, history, &c. The leading features of the system pursued, are, having a great number of teachers, generally in the proportion of one to every ten or fifteen students ; and combining constancy with variety of occupation. During most days of the week, the pupils have from seven to eight exercises, on as many different subjects, passing from one teacher to another. It is in these institutions that the German literati lay the foundation of their future eminence. The course is from five to eight years. In schools of

the second class, the ancient languages are omitted, but most of the other branches are attended to. In those of the third class, only the elementary branches, reading, writing, and arithmetic are taught. In all these schools, music is a regular matter of instruction. But the most interesting feature of this whole system, is, that religion is as regularly and as systematically taught as any other subject. Each class of schools has its regular text-books on this subject; and in all, the history and leading principles, both in doctrines and morals, of the scriptures, are inculcated. The nature of this instruction, depends of course, very much on the individual character of the man to whom it is committed, and it is too often the case, that it embraces little more than the leading facts and moral principles of the Bible, still even this is of immense advantage.

It would be interesting and instructive, did our time permit, to compare in detail the plan now described, with those adopted in different parts of our own country. We should find, I think, with regard to thoroughness of instruction in the higher schools, to the means taken to prepare suitable teachers, and the plan adopted for the support of the schools and securing regular attendance on the part of the children, that we have still much to learn from the experience of older countries. As this is a subject which is so intimately connected with the best interests of men, it demands the attention of all the friends of knowledge and religion.

There is one point suggested by what has been said, worthy of particular consideration. Is it not possible in this country, to have the Christian religion taught in the common schools? The great difficulty is, the clashing views and interests of the different religious denominations; and the principle that the state can in no way interfere on the subject of religion. With regard to the latter, it may easily be gotten over, for the government has nothing to do, either with the selection of the teacher, or with the course

of instruction. This depends on the commissioners of the several districts. If public opinion once be brought to decide for the measure, it can be accomplished ; and in many places where the people are of the same denomination, the more serious difficulty, arising from sectarian jealousies and opinions, may be avoided. But even in districts where the several denominations are nearly equally numerous, cannot this important object be attained ? The various sects are uniting, not only to distribute the Bible, but also to circulate doctrinal tracts ; may they not be induced to unite, in the preparation of religious school books, books in which the historical facts and essential doctrines, in which all evangelical denominations agree, may be taught and inculcated ? If such books could receive the sanction of the ruling bodies of the various sects among us, there would be no difficulty to their being generally introduced. If this cannot be accomplished, cannot at least the Bible be introduced ? Not merely to be read, but regularly studied, as in our Sabbath schools. Experience has taught, that no instrument is better adapted to the education of children. It calls into exercise all their faculties, interests their feelings, and cultivates their moral powers. This truth is so obvious, that in the country of which we have been speaking, men who have no regard for the Bible, as the word of God, on mere philosophical principles, urge its being made the great instrument in the education of the young. If the Bible have all these advantages for calling forth and exercising the faculties of children, it would seem, that nothing short of a dread of its effect in cultivating the moral and religious feelings, could lead to its being thrown aside, and the miserable fables commonly employed, adopted in its stead. How different would be the state of christendom, had Christians taught their children the Bible as faithfully as Mussulmans have taught the Koran.

Unless some plan can be adopted of introducing religious instruction into the common schools, we must consent to

see a large portion of our population growing up in ignorance of the first principles of moral and religious truth. For if this matter be left entirely to parents or pastors, it can be but imperfectly attended to. There will always be a large number of the people, who belong to no denomination and come under the care of none. There is said to be 70,000 of such persons, in the single city of New-York ; and we need not go many miles from our village to find individuals who hardly know that there is a God. What the result will be, of thus neglecting the moral education of the people, it requires no prophetic spirit to foretel. If public virtue be necessary to the existence of free institutions ; if reason and experience teach, that religious knowledge and culture are essential to virtue ; to leave the people destitute of this knowledge and this culture, is to secure the destruction of our civil liberty. Experience has shown, that a free government cannot exist, where the mass of the population is ignorant and immoral, and the term of its continuance amongst us is fixed to the period, when the uneducated and vicious shall constitute the majority of the people. It is enough to contrast the degradation of men who have had no moral instruction in their youth, with the character of those who have been brought up under the influence of the gospel, to have the heart filled with zeal for the extension of the blessings of religious education, even if this world were the only theatre of man's existence. But when we consider that these men, whom we thus desert to ignorance of God and his word, are forming their character for eternity, the importance of this subject is seen and felt to be infinite.

The success which in other countries has attended the efforts to render religious education universal, should encourage us to make the attempt here. So thoroughly is the system, just detailed, carried through in Prussia, that I never met a poor boy selling matches in the streets, (and I made several experiments of the kind,) who could not answer any

common question, on the historical parts of the Old and New Testaments. And one of the school commissioners of Halle, (a town containing twenty-four or twenty-six thousand inhabitants,) told me that a recent investigation led to the discovery of only fifty or sixty children who had hitherto neglected to attend the schools. Do not let us calmly sit still, therefore, and suppose that nothing can be done. If we cannot introduce religious instruction at once, into all the schools in our country, nor throughout a whole state, we may at least, endeavour to effect the object, in our own immediate neighborhoods.

The course we are pursuing in this country, is much the same as that which has been so long pursued in England. They build churches and erect school-houses. Those who choose to seek religious knowledge may find it; but there is no provision made for the instruction of all the people in the principles of Christianity, and the consequence is, that an alarming proportion of them, is left in utter ignorance on the subject. This is the great cause of the dreadful amount of crime in that country. The commitments in England and Wales are four to one in proportion to the population, to what they are even in France, and I presume they are six or eight to one to what they are in Prussia. Brethren, bear this subject in mind, remember how much depends both in time and eternity on the instruction of the young.

There is another subject connected with religious education, which must not be passed over, and that is, pastoral attention to the young. I have received the impression that this is carried to a much greater extent, in some of the continental churches, than it is among ourselves. In the Lutheran church, as you probably know it is customary, that boys at the age of fourteen and girls at fifteen, should be confirmed; that is, be called upon to assume their baptismal vows, and solemnly recognise themselves as members of the church. That there are serious evils attending this usage,

is very obvious, but that much good is effected by the pastoral attention to the young, which it occasions, cannot be denied. The candidates for confirmation each year, are formed into a class or classes, to which it is the pastor's duty to devote several hours in every week, instructing them in the principles of the gospel and of their own particular church. This course of instruction continues through the year ; and as every child must be confirmed, the whole mass of the people, rich and poor, from the king's son to the children of the peasant, are regularly indoctrinated in the christian system. The degree of fidelity with which this duty is performed, depends on the character of the pastor : but it may be remarked that even the Rationalists, in general, retain the use of Luther's catechism and other evangelical formulas in the instruction of the young. I have witnessed few scenes more impressive than the induction of one of these little flocks of the lambs of Christ, into his sacred fold. On the day appointed for this service they came to the church, with their pastor at their head. Their entrance was greeted with a burst of cheerful music, in which all hearts and voices joined. Arranged before the pulpit, the pastor proceeded to explain to them the situation in which they stood. Consecrated to God in baptism, they had been given to the church by their parents ; but having now attained an age at which they were capable of acting for themselves ; having been instructed in the doctrines and requirements of the Christian religion, and in the faith and discipline of their own church ; they were to decide whether they would remain in that church, receive its doctrines and submit to its watch and care. For the satisfaction of those present, their pastor examined them on the history and doctrines of the Bible, received their profession of faith, and solemn assent to be regarded as under the guardianship of the church. They knelt before him, the name and blessing of God was invoked upon them, and they arose in a new relation to the household of faith.

I am not, brethren, appearing here as the advocate of confirmation ; for I am persuaded, that permitting children, and all children thus to grow up into the church as a matter of course, and thus break down the distinction between the church and the world, would more than counterbalance all the good, effected by this regular course of religious instruction. I merely state these facts to call your attention to the subject, and to have the opportunity of inquiring whether sufficient pastoral attention is devoted to the young ? whether something more might not be done, to secure their regular indoctrination in our faith and discipline, and to destroy the indefinite relation in which they now grow up, to the church ? whether they might not be formed into a nursery, to be tended with peculiar care, from which the plants, from time to time might be transplanted into the garden of the Lord ? As this is a subject so immediately connected with Pastoral Theology, I refer you to the solemn lessons, which await you on this point, in a more advanced stage of your course.

III. A third great truth which an observation of the state of European churches, is adapted to impress upon the mind, is, *the intimate connexion between speculative opinion, and moral character.*

There is no sentiment more frequently advanced, than that a man's opinions have little to do with his moral character, and yet there is none more fundamentally erroneous. The fact is, that opinions on moral and religious subjects depend mainly on the state of the moral and religious feelings. Mere argument can no more produce the intimate persuasion of moral truth, than it can of beauty. As it depends on our refinement of taste, what things to us are beautiful, so it depends upon our religious feelings, what doctrines for us are true. A man's real opinions, are the expression of his character. They are the forms in which his inward feelings embody themselves, and become visible. The secret conviction of this truth, is the reason, that the ascription of obnoxious opinions, is always regarded as an asper-



sion on character. Why is the denial of God's existence regarded with horror, by all classes of men, but because it presupposes a heart dead to all the manifestations of his glory in creation, in our own nature, and in his word ? The denial of Gods justice is a proof of insensibility to sin ; the rejection of Jesus Christ, of blindness to his moral loveliness. It is therefore, an important truth, that no serious religious error can exist, without a corresponding perversion or destruction of religious feelings.

To prevent misapprehension, it may be proper to remark that while it is asserted, that if a man's feelings be in a proper state, he will embrace and believe the truth as soon it is presented; it is freely admitted, that a man's opinions may be correct, and yet his moral character corrupt. But in this case, these opinions are merely nominal, they form no part of the intimate persuasion of his soul, and hence, are no expression of his character.

In support of the point we are considering, we might refer to the different systems of religion, throughout the world, and observe their correspondence with the peculiar character of the people who embrace them. The contemplative and effeminate systems of Eastern Asia ; the mixture of loftiness and sensuality in the religion of Mohammed ; the refinement, licentiousness and general disregard of principle in the theology of the Greeks ; the more rigid features of the religion of the early Romans ; or the sanguinary creed of the warlike nations of Northern Europe. Or we might refer to the characteristic traits of the various sects in christendom, and observe how the leading features of each are expressed in their peculiar opinions. Those in whom the imagination predominates, who have liveliness without depth of religious feeling and but little reflection, have a religion of pomp and splendid forms, of fasts and festivals and of easy means of satisfying the conscience. All those in whose systems the sovereignty of God, the helplessness and dependance of man, his depravity and solemn responsibility occupy the

leading parts ; have been distinguished for severity, strictness, separation from the world, depth of feeling and fixedness of purpose : a strong determined character, whose tendency is to make the severer, prevail over the milder features of religion. The Armenian system is the natural expression, of feelings less strongly marked, of less reverence for God, less humiliating views of man, and in general of less prominence and depth of religious character. Those who have no inward necessity for the doctrines of the gospel, no apprehension of God's holiness, no fear of his justice, no adequate sense of sin, need no atoning Saviour, and no sanctifying Spirit, and thus easily satisfy themselves with the doctrines of natural religion. Another proof of this point is, that whenever a change occurs in the religious opinions of a community, it is always preceded by a change in their religious feelings. The natural expression of the feelings of true piety, is the doctrines of the Bible. As long as these feelings are retained, these doctrines will be retained ; but should they be lost, the doctrines are either held for form sake or rejected, according to circumstances ; and if the feelings be again called into life, the doctrines return as a matter of course. The proof of this remark must be sought in ecclesiastical history. Its truth can only be observed, however, where there is freedom of opinion ; where the mind is left to assume its natural form, and adopt opinions, most congenial with its state. When every thing is fixed and immoveable, as in the Catholic church, there will, of course, be little change visible, whatever may actually take place beneath the unvarying surface. But in Protestant countries we see abundant evidence of the correctness of the remark. In Scotland, the doctrines of the church are retained only by those who retain the spirit of the framers of their confession. In Geneva the system of Calvin did not survive the spirit of its author. The same may be said of France, and all parts of Germany. In this latter country the truth of our remark is more observable, because more

violent changes have there occurred than in any other portion of christendom.

After the struggle against infidelity had been sustained in England, it passed over into France and thence into Germany. Here it achieved its greatest triumph. Christianity had well nigh ceased to be even the nominal religion of the land—men began to talk of the introduction of a new Bible—of the abolition of the clergy—and of the very form of the church. To this remarkable event, this distressing fall of so large and important a part of Protestant christendom, the eyes of all interested in religion have been naturally turned, and a general demand made, what could have been the cause of so general and lamentable a defection. Much has been written on this subject, and a thousand causes assigned, while the most obvious has been the least regarded. The simple fact is, that vital religion had been long declining. There seem to be certain cycles, through which almost every church, is more or less regularly passing. During one age, there are many revivals of religion, and a general prevalence of evangelical spirit and exertion; to this succeeds a period of coldness and declension; and to this, either a period of revival or of open departure from the faith. In Germany, at the period of the reformation, there was a general revival of religion; to this succeeded a period of cold orthodoxy brought about principally by perpetual controversy on unimportant subjects. This long period, was but partially interrupted by the revival under Franke and Spener. After which, things relapsed into their former course. The preaching of the gospel was so tiresome and controversial that it could produce little effect upon the people. Practical religion was no necessary requisite for admission into the ministry; and the clergy soon became as little distinguished for piety, as any other class of men. This being the case, their holding or rejecting the doctrines of the gospel, was a mere matter of circumstance. As long as their interest, or standing depended upon their nominal

faith, they retained it ; but as soon as fashion and interest was on the side of rejecting it, they rejected it. Under Frederick the Great, infidelity became the fashion ; no opprobrium was attached even to the clergy, declaring themselves superior to the opinions and prejudices of darker ages. They had lost their hold on the doctrines of the gospel and stood ready to be carried away by the first blast that blew.

The fact, that at this juncture, the philologians, Heyne and Wolf, gave a new spring to historical criticism, and commenced distinguishing on critical grounds, the genuine from the spurious parts of the ancient classics ; led Semler and his school to follow the same course with regard the to Bible. And as they had no inward necessity for believing, their fancying, that they discovered critical grounds for the rejection of this or that book of scripture, or the whole, led them to renounce their faith in the word of God. New systems of philosophy now making their appearance, moulding religion into a hundred different shapes, completed the effect, of turning the already really unbelieving clergy and others, into the ranks of open infidelity. It was not until severe national and private afflictions began to turn the minds of all classes of men towards God, and awaken feelings which found no appropriate objects in the barren systems of philosophical religion, that men began to return to the doctrines of the Bible. And just in proportion as this revival of religion has advanced, has been the return to orthodoxy. Thus as irreligion preceded infidelity, the revival of religion has preceded a return to soundness of faith. It is this vital connexion between piety and truth, that is the great and solemn lesson, taught by the past and present state of the German churches.

This correspondence between opinion and character, is strikingly observable in the various religious parties in that section of the church. The leading parties, are the Orthodox, the Rationalists and the Pantheists. Wherever you find vital piety, that is, penitence, and a devotional spirit, there

you find, the doctrines of the fall, of depravity, of regeneration, of atonement, and the Deity of Jesus Christ. I never saw nor heard of a single individual, who exhibited a spirit of piety, who rejected any one of these doctrines. There are many who have great reverence for Jesus Christ and regard for the scriptures, but having no experience of the power of the gospel, they have no clear views nor firm conviction of its doctrines ; they are vacillating on the borders of two classes in opinion, exactly as they are in feeling.

The Rationalists as a body, are precisely like common men of the world. In general, orderly in their lives, but without the least semblance of experimental piety. They regard it as mysticism, exaggeration, enthusiasm, or hypocrisy. Some few, from the natural turn of their minds, have something of the poetry and sentimentality of religion, but nothing of vital godliness. In Pantheism there is room and expression for a variety of character. Some men of elevated intellects, discourse much, of the sublimity and grandeur of the infinite, and bow with a sort of adoration, before the living universe. But as this infinite is not a person, is neither moral nor intelligent, this system, while it inflates the imagination, gives no object for the moral feelings : and hence, when men who have much of these feelings fall into its snares, they are in torment until they find deliverance. Others of this class, from the idea, that the all pervading principle, is most completely developed in intelligent beings, and most of all, in those who have come to a consciousness of their identity with this principle, are filled with the most amazing pride ; they are God in the highest state of his existence. These are self-idolaters. Others again, of a different cast, love to feel themselves a part of an illimitable whole, which moves on and must move on, through its vast cycles, without their co-operation or responsibility, and look forward with complacency, to going out, like a spark in the ocean, unnoticed and unremembered in the infinitude of being.

Now, brethren, if these things be so, if a man's religious

opinions are the result and expression of his religious feelings, if heterodoxy be the consequence rather than the cause of the loss of piety, then "keep your hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life." Remember that it is only in God's light that you can see light. That holiness is essential to correct knowledge of divine things, and the great security from error. And as you see, that when men lose the life of religion, they can believe the most monstrous doctrines, and glory in them ; and that when the clergy once fall into such errors, generations perish before the slow course of reviving piety brings back the truth ; "what manner of men ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness." Not only then for your own sake, but for the sake of your children, and your children's children, forsake not your God ; who is our God, because he was the God of our fathers. The fate of future ages, rests with every present generation.

Again, beware of any course of life or study, which has a tendency to harden your hearts, and deaden the delicate sensibility of the soul to moral truth and beauty. There are two ways in which this may be done, a course of sin, and indulgence in metaphysical speculations on divine things. The reason, why such speculations produce this effect, is, that the views of truth thus taken are not of its moral nature, and of course produce no moral feeling, but the reverse. Let a man, when contemplating the grandeur of alpine scenery, begin to examine the structure of the mountains, and study their geological character ; what becomes of his emotions of sublimity ? Thus also religious truth, viewed in the general, produces devotion ; metaphysically analyzed it destroys it. Where is our reverence and awe of God, while prying into his essence or scrutinizing his attributes ? Where are our feelings of penitence, when disputing on the origin of evil ? our sense of responsibility when discussing free-will and dependence ? That it may be necessary to attend to these subjects, and get as far as possible defi-

nite ideas respecting them, no one will deny ; but when our habitual views of truth, are of this nature, there is an end of all feeling on the subject. There is another remark, which may here be made. When a man prefers examining the geological structure of a mountainous region, to the contemplation of its grandeur ; he only prefers the acquisition of knowledge to the enjoyment of an elevating emotion ; but as the objects of his examination are external, and have no connexion with the emotions of his mind, his insensibility is no obstacle to his progress. But with regard to moral subjects the case is far different ; the feelings destroyed by metaphysical investigation, are the very objects to be investigated, for their moral quality is their essence. If this be weakened or destroyed, there is nothing left ; and a man in this state is no more qualified to speak on these subjects, than the deaf to discourse on music. This is the reason that metaphysicians so often advance doctrines, which the whole world know to be false, because they contradict the strongest moral feelings of the soul. Will the mass of pious people ever be brought to believe, that God is the author of sin ? that man is not free, and consequently not accountable ? that sin is not a moral evil, but mere imperfect development ? or the still more horrible opinion, that God himself, is merely the blind instinctive principle, which animates and constitutes the universe, of which neither moral nor intellectual qualities can be predicated ? Yet metaphysicians teach all these doctrines. Look around you, brethren, and see if these things be not so. As far as my observation extends, it is the uniform tendency of such speculations to deaden the moral sensibility of the soul. Beware then of unhallowed speculations on sacred subjects. Bring all your doctrines to the test of God's word and of holiness. Go with your new opinions to the aged children of God, who have spent years in close communion with the Father of lights. Propose to them your novel doctrines, should they shock their feelings, depend upon it, they are false and dangerous.

The approbation of an experienced Christian of any purely religious opinion, is worth more, than that of any merely learned theologian upon earth.

Finally, lean not to your own understanding. If there be any declaration of the Bible, confirmed by the history of the church, and especially by the recent history of European churches, it is that “he that leaneth to his own understanding is a fool.” When men forsake the word of God, and profess to be wise above that which is written, they inevitably and universally lose themselves in vain speculations. Look at the state of things, when every man is following the light of his own reason. Each boasts that he alone has the truth, and yet each is often a miracle of folly to every man but himself.\* True, such men are often men of great intellect; but can mere intellect perceive moral truth? Can man by wisdom find out God? can he find out the Almighty unto perfection? No man knoweth the Father but the Son and he to whom the Son shall reveal him. Submit yourselves, therefore, to the teaching of him, in whom “are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” It is only when thus taught, that you will be able to teach others also.

One word more—keep as you would your hold on heaven your reverence for Jesus Christ. Reverence for the Redeemer of sinners, is the very last feeling which deserts a falling Christian, or a sinking church. When all other evidence, and all other arguments for the Bible had lost their force, this solitary feeling has held up the soul from sinking into infidelity and thence into perdition. When this is lost, all is lost. The soul that is insensible to the glory of the Son of God, is “as a tree twice dead and plucked up by the roots.”

\* *Nihil tam absurde dici potest, quod non dicatur ab aliquo philosophorum.*—CICERO.

Φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοὶ ἐμωράνθησαν.—PAUL.













